

HACKNEY UNION NEWS

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NALGO - ALL OUT STRIKE

by John Lang

The first three weeks of July saw NALGO members taking part in all out national strike action on six separate days.

The action, which was voted for by 60% of those taking part in the ballot, meant that NALGO members were taking part in their first ever national strike. Thus the single largest group of workers (500,000) since the General Strike of 1926 were involved in a strike.

Ballot Held

The strike ballot was called following the employers refusal to increase their 7% pay offer and attempts to dismantle national pay scales and conditions.

NALGO is one of several unions who are having to defend their national agreements at the moment. In an effort to tackle the problem of low pay amongst local government workers, NALGO are demanding £1,200 or a 12% pay rise (whichever is the greater).

Despite of the fact that other smaller local government unions decided against taking industrial action and media efforts to rubbish the dispute, the strike was very successful.



NALGO workers standing up against low pay

Hackney Action Solid

NALGO estimated that 90% of its members did not turn up for work on the first day of the strike. In Hackney the strike was solid with 95% taking part in the action.

Local Branch Secretary Ian Charlton, stated that "fears that members may drift back to work after the initial one day strike never materialised. The unity amongst members has been excellent"

As we go to press NALGO are preparing to ballot all members on 4 selective one day strikes and members in key areas such as finance and poll tax offices are to be balloted on indefinite strike action.

Hackney Teachers Take Action on Class Sizes

by R. Rieser

Hackney Council, Save Hackney Education Services and the Hackney Parents Action Group have been campaigning for more money to go to local authorities for education services when the ILEA is abolished.

Hackney is expecting a 7% shortfall next year, and a 40% cut over the next few years.

Over 500 people signed a petition for additional funding at the Hackney Show which was circulated by the Hackney Teacher's Association.

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Photograph by Peter Walsh (PROFILE)

BALLOT ENDS P&O STRIKE

by John Lang

The strike involving 2,300 sacked seafarers from the P&O shipping company has ended after 16 months.

The strike began in February '88 following P&O's attempts to impose 500 redundancies and to introduce new working conditions which would have dramatic effects on health and safety. This decision was taken less than one year after the ferry disaster at Zeebrugge.

The full force of the anti trade union laws were used to ensure that the strike did not spread. A national ballot of the NUS's 21,000 members was cancelled in the wake of a court injunction threatening sequestration of the unions funds.

Threat of Sequestration

A strike by Sealink workers at Dover in support of their colleagues from P&O did take place and the unions assets were sequestered. After 9 days the union purged contempt and all secondary action was called off.

Support Groups were set up by their supporters and by the strikers themselves. Despite great efforts support for the strike failed to maintain momentum and gradually more and more strikers drifted away from the dispute.

The strikers were left in isolation but they continued to travel the country speaking at meetings and attending fundraising events to ensure that the strike could continue.

Eventually, against their wishes, a ballot of those members still on strike

was taken and the strike was called off.

There are now many activist who were involved in the dispute who face job victimisation in future. The strike has cost P&O over £25 million but has cost many of the strikers much more in human terms.

Within 1 week of the strike being called off P&O and Sealink announced that they were to merge and intend to run several cross channel "super ferries" in preparation for competition with the channel tunnel. Many NUS members will now face working alongside the "scab labour" employed P&O.



Photo: Courtesy of Rislane

Local Health Authority Bid to Opt Out of NHS

In spite of reservations expressed at their April meeting, the City and Hackney District Health Authority have submitted proposals to "opt out" of the NHS and thus privatise health care locally and become independent.

This decision appears to have been taken by a handful of managers and senior medical staff. It was never agreed to at any

meeting of the DHA. More importantly the workers and users of Hackney's NHS have never been consulted as to what their opinions might be.

"Opting out" is just one part of the Government's plans for the NHS and the campaign against the whole of White Paper is growing locally. There has already been two successful lobbys of DHA meetings and a

public meeting held at Hackney Town Hall attracted over 100 people.

The public meeting was used as a platform to launch a local "Hands off our Health Service" campaign.



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BITTER DISPUTE ON THE DOCKS

by Mark Metcalf

As we go to press, 3,000 dockers in Liverpool and Bristol were on strike in support of their jobs & conditions. However, under threat of sacking by dock employers, many have returned to work or have been forced to accept redundancy.

The dockers took strike action following the Government's decision to scrap the National Dock Labour Scheme (NDLS) and the National Association of Port Employers (NAPE) usual to negotiate a similar national scheme covering all registered ports.

Unofficial Action

The strike was held up for 3 months due to legal wrangles as the NAPE used the Courts to try and block action. The port employers' actions led to unofficial action in May at Tilbury, Liverpool, Lowestoft & Bristol. Other ports however remained at work and TGWU officials eventually persuaded strikers to return to work until all the legal restrictions, obstructing the right to strike, had been defeated in the courts.

Second Ballot

The second national ballot produced a majority of 6,200 against 2,100 in favour of strike action and on July 11th many ports were at a standstill as dockers mounted pickets at the gates.

Despite Port Employers predicting that many ports would continue working, over 95% of dockers previously covered by the NDLS began strike action.

During the first couple of weeks of the strike a number of weaknesses emerged and a number of small ports began to drift back to work. At others a number of dockers took voluntary redundancy of up to £35,000 leaving some strikers confused and demoralised.

Precarious Position

At this point it appears that the dockers are in a very precarious position.

The Port Employers have made clear that they want to see the docks 'union-free' and such a challenge to the TGWU, especially in the Centenary year of the Great Dock strike, can't be ignored.

One of the most pleasing aspects of the strike has been the emergence of a number of Support Groups under the banner of the 'Solidarity Network.'



Photo: Nigel Tamburra

In order to win, the dockers will need to picket out both those ports previously covered by the NDLS and those like Felixstowe and Dover who were not.

However, under anti-trade union legislation, such actions constitute 'secondary action' and would mean breaking the law.

Meanwhile there is a high probability that striking dockers will remain outside of the dock gates for a very long time whilst those who continue to work will find their hard won wages and conditions being quickly destroyed.

These have shown that many workers, students and unemployed are keen to support the dockers. Such groups are broad based and seek to raise financial and political support for those dockers in struggle.

Support Group Formed

One group, the East London Dock Support Group, has already raised over £1,250 and has leafleted a number of workplaces.

Meetings of the East London Docks Support Group start 8pm every Tuesday at the Approach Tavern, Approach Road E2. Details of other support groups from the unit.

When the 1988 TUC Congress delegates euphorically embraced European Commission president Jacque Delors to its bosom, many of us watched in bemusement.

In previous years there had been well-founded skepticism among trade unionists of the Single European Act. A measure designed to produce a single market in the 12 members states by 1992, and remove all barriers to the free flow of capital across European national borders.

The purpose of this change is to make Western Europe more competitive internationally with the economies of the US and Japan. In particular, there is a drive to improve European performance in the areas of high technology and electronics.

Europe 1992

Already, in the lead up to 1992 we have seen many companies preparing to compete with their huge multi-national rivals by increasing the size of their own operations through take-overs and mergers.

Another trend has been to cut employment levels in existing operations to increase productivity. For instance in France, Renault has already cut its workforce by 20% over the last five years.

It has been estimated that at least two million jobs will be at risk in the first year following the introduction of the single European market.

1992

What's In It for Trade Unions?

by Midge Purcell



Europe's workers look toward an uncertain future.

Among the members of the European Trade Union Federation there has been a fear that with greater mobility, companies would divest from areas that afforded workers the best wage levels and conditions, and opt to move to member states with poorer social provision and worker protection.

In the second week of July this year, Volkswagen in Britain announced that it will switch production to either Spain or Portugal by 1992 because of lower wage levels there.

To avoid this trend, trade union organisations have pushed consistently for a social charter to harmonise the conditions for workers across the EEC.

In the early deliberations about the "social dimension" of the single market, there were some differences in priorities between national union centres.

The West German DGB felt that not only did their relatively high wages and standards need to be protected, but also rights it had won in the area of consultation, information co-determination, and works councils.

North - South Divide

Other TU centres, like Italy and Spain were more concerned that the EC should be used to reduce the inequities between the more developed North of Europe and the less developed South.

The French on the other hand had been pushing for community regulations on daily and weekly working times - a measure that would likely meet resistance from UK unions, some of whose members rely heavily on overtime.

A staunch hold-out in the EEC euphoria is the French CGT, who have expressed fear that any harmonisation of wages and conditions would be downward, and the struggle to resist this threat, and gain improvements, had to be waged in each individual country.

Great - we can go and search for work unsuccessfully in Greece!



Another aspect of the Single European Act which should concern trade unionists is the impact that 1992 will have on black and migrant workers.

There are about 16 million migrants, migrants, and refugees in the European Community. In the run up to the single market, member states, including Britain have tightened immigration controls and deportations have increased across Europe with no effective right of appeal.

Legislation is being put into place which will restrict the rights of immigrants to bring their families, travel and work freely in EC countries, as well as establishing a network of internal controls in which a person's immigration status is constantly checked.

Outlook for a Social Charter

The outlook for the adoption of a social charter is still unoptimistic, even though a consensus on content has been reached by ETUC affiliated unions. The Social Charter includes:

- * The right to paid leave and weekly rest period.
- * The right to social protection (social security, sickness & unemployment benefit).
- * The right to belong to a trade union, bargain collectively and the right to strike.
- * The right to vocational training.
- * The right of men and women to equal treatment.
- * The right to information, consultation, and participation of workers.
- * The right to health & safety, the protection of children, the elderly,
- * The right of the disabled to be integrated into working life, and,
- * The right to a minimum income that guarantees a decent standard of living.

However, there has been voracious opposition by the Thatcher government to the provisions of the Charter, and the UK are determined to block it.

The dangerous implications of this "Fortress Europe" for the trade union movement is the development of a two-tier system of worker's rights.

One system where European workers, if the Social Charter were to be agreed, would have increased mobility, security and improved conditions, while their non-European brothers and sisters would become more vulnerable and exploitable, with few guaranteed rights.

Europe 1992

In an attempt to avoid the potentially explosive consequences of a Europe divided on the basis of race and nationality,

organisations like the "Whose Europe?" campaign have proposed:

Full civic, welfare, employment and training rights, and free movement within the EC for all people living in EC countries; full rights for refugees and asylum-seekers, and the right to family unity.

Currently there is no mention of migrant worker's rights in Social Charter. Nor is the issue of race discrimination included in the document.

These are omissions that the trade union movement can ill-afford if it wants to build a united, cohesive workforce that is able to successfully face a bigger, more confident corporate structure in 1992.

Support for Kurdish Refugees

by Midge Purcell

Since the 2nd of May, more than 3500 Kurds have arrived in Britain from the Kurdish areas of Turkey where they are facing an increasing wave of persecution by the military regime.

Many of the refugees have been received community, church, and trade union groups in Hackney, Haringey and Islington, who have provided emergency accommodation, food, and political support for the refugee's fight to secure political asylum in Britain.

On July 29th, thousands marched through the streets of Hackney, demanding that there be no deportations of the Kurds back to Turkey, and that all refugees who are in detention be released.

More than 150 Kurds are still being held in detention centres and prisons while their claims for asylum are processed.

Round-ups in Villages

The refugees are primarily from the Maras region of Southeast Turkey where villages in the area have systematically subjected to round-ups by the security forces.

There are more than 400,000 government troops stationed in the area, in an attempt to prevent local support for Kurdish guerillas fighting in the region.

To this end, Turkey has also initiated a program of depopulation in the Kurdish areas. Laws have recently been passed that enables the Turkish government to evacuate up to 9.3 million people living in Eastern Turkey.

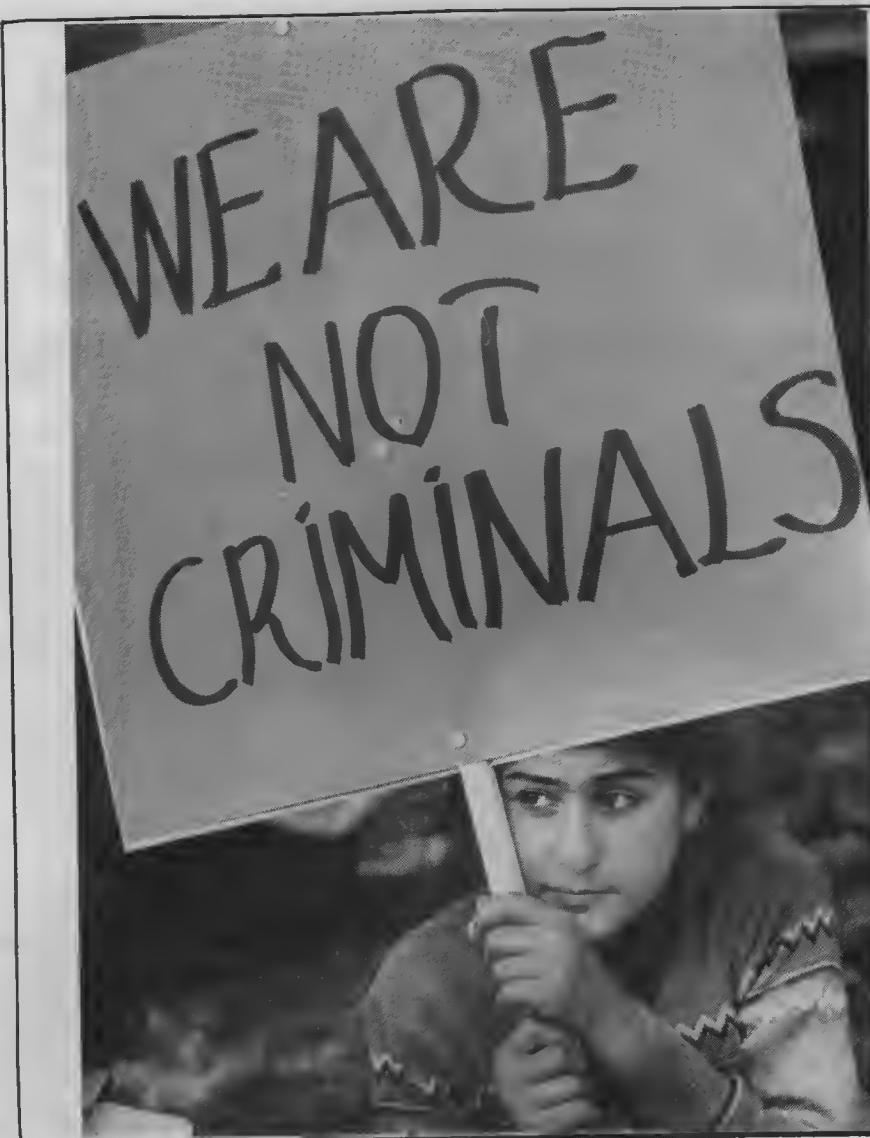


Photo: Russell Boyce

The effect of depopulation is to disperse a nationally conscious Kurdish community and fragment the strength of their political, and cultural organisations.

These events, combined with the result of local elections in Maras, in which extreme right-wing forces were elected to municipal office, are key reasons for the exodus of Kurds from the region.

In response to the situation, the British government has imposed visa restrictions for Turkish nationals which will make it virtually impossible for Kurds to escape persecution and torture.

The action of the Tory government has come under fierce criticism by church

and refugee support groups who point out that Britain has an extremely poor record on accepting refugees, taking far fewer than other countries with less resources.

Appeal to Trade Unions

The KRSG has put out an appeal to the trade union and labour movement for continuing support. What branches can do is:

Pass resolutions in support of the refugees; invite speakers to meetings; send donations; and write to the Home Office and your MP and protest against the Government's treatment of the refugees.

For more information contact: Kurdish Refugee Support Group, 489 Kingsland Road. London E8 01 249 6930.

My Visit to Apartheid

I am a South African by birth. When I returned there early this year to visit my family, I met many people involved in the struggle against apartheid, and was warmly received everywhere I went.

Although its inadequate, I would like to try and repay my hosts by sharing some of my experiences with the trade union movement in Hackney.

During my stay, I had an opportunity to visit the offices of the trade unions, progressive and church organisations. All of these places had a poster of the young Nelson Mandela displayed on their walls.

Mandela's Eyes Covered

His eyes were always covered by a black strip, as it is the law in South Africa that pictures of prisoners or detainees have to have their eyes hidden. The official rationale is to protect the prisoner from social stigma after s/he is released.

The freedom movement sees it as another method of dehumanising the heroes of the struggle. These marred photographs are the only official picture that exists of Nelson Mandela in South Africa.



EXPLOITED

They stand above us and the law
We the masses of this land in oppression
We peasants of this soil in degradation
we who say power and unity

Mteto Mzongwana

In one of the townships, I went to a community advice centre where the workers explained the "rights" of the people detained under various emergency regulations. There are many people who are detained under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act.

Detention under the Act can mean indefinite detention without the right to see family or friends while the detainee is interrogated for suspected involvement in "terrorism or subversion".

"Terrorism" is defined as "acts of resistance against the government or economy using force", and "subversion" is an act of resistance without force, eg. general stayaways and consumer boycotts.

While we were discussing the implications of the restrictions, a young man came in who had just been released from detention. He had organised a meeting of 800 students and teachers on the grounds of a local school. He was arrested the next day.

When asked about his experiences, he said that the high spirits in the prison gave them strength to continue the struggle.

The motto of everyone working on the the fall of the apatheid is "organise or die". There was absolute conviction that their fight was a genuine fight for justice and a strong belief in the certainty of a new society organised on socialist principles.

"HANDS OFF OUR HEALTH SERVICE"

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A number of campaigning tactics have been agreed and several have already been implemented. These tactics include:

Producing more information leaflets about the White Paper, writing to local MP's doctors and consultants to express opposition to the White

Paper, lobbying the North East Thames and City and Hackney Health Authorities as well as Hackney Council and Parliament.

Petition Organised

A petition is also being organised (these are already available) and links are being made with other East London campaigns.

The campaign is meeting on a fortnightly basis, alternating between daytime and evening meetings. All are welcome to attend.

If you would like more information about the campaign or copies of the petition then contact Mike Bold at 24a Stoke Newington High St. N16 phone 249-1917 (24 hour ansaphone) or Hackney Trade Union Support Unit, phone 249-8086.



Hackney Teachers to Ballot on Class Size Limits

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They also organised about 100 children, parents and teachers to lobby then Education Secretary, Kenneth Baker at the Department of Education Services.

Now Mr. Baker has agreed to give £100 million extra to the London Boroughs as a transitional payment.

However, the HTA says that much more is still needed in order to attract teachers to the area. As the year dominated by teachers shortages in Hackney ends, there is the looming prospect of teachers returning in September to shortages of up to 92 primary class teachers, 30 primary heads and deputies, and as many as 30 secondary posts unfilled.

Although the ILEA are currently trawling Europe for teachers, and 4 or 5 have been recruited from Belfast, all permanent and casual supply teachers will be needed to cover vacancies.

No Cover

This means that there will be virtually no cover available for day to day short term or unplanned absences. An inevitable consequence of this would be amalgamated classes and larger class sizes.

Faced with this prospect, the Hackney Teacher's Association will be balloting all primary, secondary and special school members on class size action in all Hackney schools where classes are above the NUT class size figures.

The maximum levels are: 20 in secondary practical, 24 in vertically grouped, 27 in reception, and 30 in all other classes.

There will also be restrictions on NUT members covering for vacancies unless they are employed for that purpose. Tower Hamlets will also be balloting their members for similar action.

Ballot to Be Held

The ballot is expected to take place on the first day of term, with action taking effect immediately after 24 hours notice to parents.

For more information contact: HTA Gen. Sec. Richard Rieser on 254 7603.